



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF CORONER

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February 27, 2004

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: LAKSHMANAN SATHYAVAGISWARAN, M.D.
CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER

SUBJECT: **FIRE INCIDENT REPORT OF 2-24-04**

On 2-24-04, at approximately 0730 hours, LAC+USC facilities personnel (Zone 5) were assigned to dismantle and remove an old freezer unit from the Coroner's Forensic Science Center which was located on the second floor of the 1104 building outside of room 206. To accomplish this task, they used a saw and other tools in an effort to complete the dismantling. After three hours they chose to use a blow torch to cut the freezer in half. This caused the insulation to catch fire and produce smoke and the smell of burning. They put out the flame with a wet mop and then left the building.

After returning from lunch they continued using the blow torch which caused the insulation inside the freezer to catch fire again and produce flame as well as a lot of smoke. The workers put out the flame with the use of a 5 gallon bottle of drinking water and a fire extinguisher. At no time did any of the lab or building structure catch fire. Fire damage was limited to the freezer unit itself.

However, due to the large amount of smoke in the hallway the laboratory staff were alarmed and the laboratory supervisor ordered evacuation of the floor. As a result, the fire alarm was pulled at 1358 hrs.

Employees of the 1104 and 1102 buildings complied with the fire alarm and evaluated in an orderly manner. During this evacuation, the Zone 5 personnel did not evacuate despite being requested to do so by the laboratory supervisor.

I was in a meeting in my office with law enforcement personnel and was advised of thick smoke in the hallway. I observed a large amount of smoke in the hallway as well as a large amount of water on the floor directly in front of the stairway exit door as I evacuated with other personnel.

Captain Campbell, Incident Commander, was advised by the laboratory supervisor that the Zone 5 personnel refused to evacuate the building, and he re-entered the building to check on their safety. Captain Campbell also contacted Campus Police and was told that they and a facilities engineer would respond. However there was

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no response by the fire department. It was later determined that the non-response by the Fire Department was due to the fact that the Zone 5 staff called their office at the time of the alarm and advised it was a false alarm. They in turn canceled the fire department response.

Captain Campbell gave the all clear signal at approximately 1410 hours. At which time, employees re-entered both buildings.

Ms. Ahonima, Administrative Services Manager, who inspected the incident site with me, felt that the atmosphere was not conducive to proper working conditions. As a result, personnel who work on the second floor of the 1104 building were allowed to go home for the day.

I requested that the Fire Department respond to give a proper evaluation of the scene. They responded at 1434 hours and confirmed there were no longer any more hot spots.

There are no injuries or illness to report from this incident at this time. On 2-25-04, I advised Ms. Sharon Harper, Chief Deputy Administrative Officer of this incident and on 2-26-04, I informed Chairman of the Board, Supervisor Knabe.

LS/fvh

C: David Janssen, CAO
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors